

**ROUNDTABLE/WORKING MEETING
TRANSPORTATION ISSUES**

DATE	Monday, December 14, 2015
TIME	5:38 P.M.
LOCATION	Sullivan Chamber
PURPOSE	Roundtable/working meeting to discuss transportation issues
ATTENDEES	Mayor Maher Vice Mayor Benzan Councillor Carlone Councillor Cheung Councillor Kelley Councillor Mazen Councillor McGovern Councillor Simmons Councillor Toomey Richard C. Rossi, City Manager Lisa Peterson, Deputy City Manager Lee Gianetti, Director of Communications and Community Relations Taha Jennings, Assistant to the City Manager Joseph Barr, Director, Traffic, Parking and Transportation Department Brad Garrett, Deputy Director, Traffic, Parking and Transportation Department Iram Farooq, Assistant City Manager for Community Development Susanne Rasmussen, Director of Environment and Transportation Planning, Community Development Department Owen O’Riordan, Commissioner, Department of Public Works Kathy Watkins, Senior Engineer, Department of Public Works Jack Albert, Deputy Superintendent, Cambridge Police Department Sandra Albano, Executive Assistant to the City Council Paula Crane, Deputy City Clerk Donna P. Lopez, City Clerk

DISCUSSION SUMMARY

Mayor Maher convened the meeting at 5:38 PM. He stated that there will be no public comment and no votes will be taken and that the meeting is not being publicly recorded but may be privately recorded. Mayor Maher asked City Manager Richard Rossi to introduce the speakers. Mr. Rossi stated that transportation planning

involves many City departments and planning is done in collaboration. He introduced Joseph Barr, Director, Traffic, Parking and Transportation Department.

Mr. Barr stated that the evening's presentation will include different presenters which will optimize getting valuable information to the City Council.

Iram Farooq, Assistant City Manager for Community Development, stated that there are many City departments represented at the table. She stated that City departments working together is an important component of how transportation planning and infrastructure changes are dealt with. She stated that it is important that all departments are involved at just about every stage. She noted that while the Community Development Department may conduct early stage planning it is not without the benefit of thinking how the project will be built, how safety will be managed, how emergency vehicles will pass through the area. She stated that the work is richer as a result of this collaboration. She stated that it is the goal to have all projects have this holistic perspective.

Mr. Barr stated that the City also works with both State and regional agencies at the planning, funding and implementation levels. He noted that regional engagement has increased over recent years and added that the City Manager was recently at an event in Quincy unveiling a regional partnership in these issues. He stated that the Green Line project is in the midst of being reevaluated and assessed due to the 50% increase in cost. He noted that the two options that are being discussed is the cancellation of the project or substantially reducing the cost of the project. He stated that this project would expect additional money to come from federal funds that are allocated at the regional level. He noted that while they are also looking at scaling back the cost, they are looking for additional funds. Mr. Barr said that in terms of reducing cost some of the discussion involves scaling back stations, changes to the Union Square Branch and changes to the viaduct and community path design. He stated that next steps are to revise the design and determine if the project will proceed, determine new project delivery approach, and procure new consultants and contractors. He stated that Cambridge's involvement could potentially include the evaluation of the request for financial contribution, monitoring the project status and lobbying for project continuation.

Susanne Rasmussen, Director of Environment and Transportation Planning, Community Development Department, stated that safety for all modes is paramount. She stated that a street system contributes to helping to meet storm water goals. She stated that transportation is seen as a way to contribute to healthy living. She stated that people should be able to travel safely no matter what their age. She stated that the environmental impact is that it is obvious that the more people you can use other modes of transportation without the use of vehicles is much better. She stated that we know from research that relying on sustainable goals helps the economy. She added that people who walk, bicycle, and use transit tend to shop locally and more frequently. She stated that sustainable modes not only help air quality and the environment but directly strengthen local businesses. She stated that creating a transportation network that allows active participation is beneficial to all of the community. She stated that there are many policy guidelines to rely on in their work. She noted that the City of Cambridge has had the Vehicle Trip Reduction Ordinance in place for almost twenty-five years and the Parking and Transportation Demand Management ordinance has been in place for close to 20 years. She added that more recently, additional planning has been added around climate change, a transit strategic plan and new bicycle plan. She stated that there are four categories that are focused on when speaking about planning: outreach and education, reducing the traffic impact of development, adapting infrastructure to enable people of all ages and abilities to travel by foot, bike and transit and working regionally to increase transit use and capacity and ensure resiliency of transit and roadway systems. She stated that there has been a large

surge in people's interest in events and classes. She noted that in the past year there has been big uptake around how many more people are engaged directly and receiving training. She stated that the Safe Routes To School Program is a highly popular program with both kids and parents.

Ms. Rasmussen stated that the focus is on controlled demand when new buildings are built. She stated that the Special Permit review and zoning process are where these become reality. She stated that developers are participating in limiting demand for driving. She stated that the focus of adapting to infrastructure includes the redesign of streets. Ms. Rasmussen noted that new technologies are changing the transportation system such as information about transit infrastructure through transit screens which are made available to the public to make it faster and easier to use public transportation.

Ms. Rasmussen noted that Cambridge is very far ahead in the nation in terms of how residents get around. She stated that a significant contributor is the mixed-use development in the City. She stated that people are driving less and using other modes more. She added that parking permits have decreased while the number of houses are increasing. She advised that the City of Cambridge is holding steady or slightly declining in terms of cars on the road.

Katherine Watkins, Senior Engineer, Department of Public Works, spoke about overall infrastructure improvement programs. She stated that the Five-Year Plan identifies the streets and sidewalks that are anticipated to be reconstructed each year. She stated that they focus on the complete streets program which looks at all users and accessibility. She stated that the map is a 5-year plan which outlines where construction will be in the next 5 years. She stated that they look at existing utilities as well as streets and sidewalks. She noted that utility projects are funded in the amount of \$25-\$30 million per year. She noted that larger projects, e.g. Harvard Square, Main Street, tend to run between \$5-\$10 million. She stated that the City receives \$4.5 for Chapter 90 projects. She stated that these are the major categories of funding.

Ms. Watkins stated that community process includes coordination between CDD and DPW. They have increased the commitment with the community regarding design and ongoing coordination throughout construction. She stated that Western Avenue is the most recently completed utility project. She stated that it gave the City the opportunity to work with the community on the streetscape design.

Jack Albert, Deputy Superintendent, Cambridge Police Department, stated that they are not finding major conflicts between pedestrian and cars on Western Avenue. Mr. Rossi added that the City has requested of the State to control the traffic lights at Western and River Streets to no avail. He noted that he feels that if the City had control and could assume responsibility of the traffic lights, there would be a better flow of traffic. He stated that to date the State is reluctant.

Katherine Watkins stated that as it relates to the Alewife Sewer Separation Project, the City is part of the Boston Harbor Cleanup. She stated that sewer separation is on schedule to be completed as of the end of this year. She stated that this has been a huge effort and that in the long-term there are significant environmental benefits from this project. She stated that when looking at projects, the City tries to maximize other co-benefits. She stated that the long term benefit is significant. As it relates to The Port Infrastructure Project, Ms. Watkins stated that the design process will begin in the spring and they will be reaching out to the community. She stated that the timing of this project is not court-ordered so it is up to the City to see what makes sense. She stated that Kendall Square is starting to come to fruition.

She spoke about Chapter 90 projects such as Broadway and Longfellow Road.

Deputy Superintendent Albert stated that the City provided indications that bike trips were increasing dramatically. He stated that the Police Department is seeing a dramatic decrease in bike crashes and pedestrian crashes. He stated that the crash rate overall for all types of accidents is dropping. He stated that the trend continues to drop significantly. He stated that the reduction has to do with the direction the City has taken on engineering. He stated that these numbers prove that what is being done in the City is working. He stated that enforcement used to be the first thing to address any issues on the roadway and that is not currently the case.

As it relates to the organizational chart, Mr. Barr introduced Brad Gerratt, Deputy Director of Traffic, Parking and Transportation and Brooke McKenna. Mr. Gerratt stated that they continue to hire and fill vacancies within the department. He gave an overview of his priorities which include customer service improvement, technology upgrades, operational effectiveness and sustainability. He stated that upcoming initiatives include a Pay-By-Phone pilot program in Harvard Square, the pilot of Smart Meters, a Transit Signal Priority for the bus system and capital improvements to the First Street Garage.

Susanne Rasmussen stated that they have been undertaking planning around bicycles for a long time. She stated that they are looking at opportunities for separation that will improve safety and allow a broader range of people to cycle. She stated that large vehicles are one key factor to cycling safety. She stated that the installation of side guards on large City vehicles will have major impact in preventing serious injury or death. She stated that transportation is a contributor to greenhouse gas pollutants and noted that it is important to think about long-term thinking regarding carbon neutrality. She stated the need to get to total carbon neutrality. She stated that car-sharing is coming rapidly and the city must be able to accommodate it in a way that does not have detrimental impact on other systems.

Mr. Barr stated that as it relates to freight/goods, there are many partnerships that are needed. He stated that the City Council has mentioned new mobility devices. He stated that there is a new class of devices and added that enhancing transit is a priority which would allow buses to move more quickly through the city.

In relation to pedestrian and bicycle crashes, Councillor Toomey asked why pedestrians are not crossing at the same time at a 4-way intersection. He stated that it would make more sense for all pedestrians to cross at the same time. Mr. Barr stated that the general approach is to have concurrent pedestrian signals. He stated that this reduces the delay for pedestrians. He noted that the general approach is that they want drivers to yield to pedestrians in crosswalks. He said that when they have "hot" locations where there is high pedestrian traffic, they will sometimes install an exclusive pedestrian phase such as Massachusetts Avenue and Alewife. He stated that this is the right approach for people with impairments. Ms. Rasmussen added that research has been conducted in situations where there was exclusive pedestrian phase and the number of incidents is higher because pedestrians were unwilling to accept the length of delay before they were prompted to cross. She stated that crash statistics do not show an increase in accidents as a result of current policies in place.

Councillor Toomey asked about Police enforcement in the evenings when bicyclists should be wearing helmets and lights. He stated that Police Department should enforce these regulations. Deputy Superintendent Albert stated that there are three different highway grants and the vast majority of this grant money is spent during the hours of 4:00 p.m. to midnight. He added that the Cambridge Police Department takes every opportunity to educate bicyclists. Councillor Toomey asked for any figures that could be provided in this regard.

Councillor Kelley stated the importance of looking at statistics to figure out what is relevant relating to trends and a sustainable community. He stated that the bicycle crash numbers are up. He noted that the percentage is down but the number of crashes is up. He stated that he is not a fan of separated bike lanes and added that he would like more emphasis on making turning safer. He commented that he is confused as to why we are building lights that do not recognize cyclists and noted that he would like more emphasis on this problem.

Councillor Carlone stated that we all know that Central Square is a high crash area for bikes and pedestrians. He asked what could be done in Central Square, if anything. He stated that he has heard about a proposal to move bicycle lanes in Central Square parallel to Massachusetts Avenue. Susanne Rasmussen responded that the bike plan has thoughts on what kinds of treatments are appropriate for certain kinds of streets. She stated that Central Square is a very busy place with a lot of “in and out,” such as buses, delivery trucks, etc. She stated that when you constantly have delivery vehicles in the mix it is important to find a way to organize so that there is not constant conflict.

Mr. Rossi stated that in the mid-90’s a travel lane coming from Kendall Square to Harvard Square was removed to widen the sidewalk, create a bike lane and slow speed. He stated that the loss of parking on the back streets was a concern. Cara Seiderman Transportation Planner, Environmental and Transportation Planning Division, Community Development Department, stated that it is important to understand what can be done in the future. She stated that the primary issue is that Massachusetts Avenue is the spine of the city and that is where people want to go. She stated that it is a destination street and Massachusetts Avenue is vital. Councillor Carlone stated that an alternative to travelling Massachusetts Avenue might not be a bad idea. Ms. Seiderman stated that this is something that can be discussed during the process. Councillor Carlone asked if the pedestrian plan is always in movement or is there an update timetable that will be met. Ms. Rasmussen responded that they are looking at it currently with the purpose of making a determination of how extensive an update needs to be. She stated that there will be an update next year but added that it will not be an extensive update.

Councillor Carlone asked the reasoning for Smart Meters beginning in Harvard Square. Mr. Barr stated that it is a partnership with the businesses to get the word out and he noted that Harvard Square has a very successful business association along with high parking demand. He stated that it seemed like a logical place to start. Councillor Carlone asked if they will look at varied pricing based on location and time of day. Mr. Barr stated that this will be looked at. He stated that they want to look at raising and lowering rates.

Councillor Carlone asked about Lechmere Station. He stated that if the City does participate in financing he would like a station that respects Lechmere Square and not have a parking lot between the main station entry and the square itself. He stated that the earlier design from the 80’s had a major architectural expression that said “entry” and the present design has nothing like that. Mr. Barr stated that redesign of stations is being looked at.

Councillor Cheung stated that the Green Line is not only about Somerville and will have huge impact on Cambridge. He stated that he uses Smart Meters in Boston and they work great. He stated that he would like to see implementation accelerated. He asked about the Slow signs on Lakeview Avenue. He asked if this is a pilot program. Ms. Watkins responded that the message board is temporary. She added that there has been a fair amount of disagreement about what changes the neighborhood would like to see. She stated that the message boards are for transition purposes only. Mr. Barr stated that as it relates to

advisory speed limits, he is hesitant to put up signs that do not have a legal basis. He stated that the work that has been done in terms of slowing speeds, along with engineering methods, have been beneficial.

Mr. Rossi stated that the city speaks with Somerville quite often. The info that he is receiving is not a rosy picture. It is about delays in construction by the T, cost overruns and a reduction in quality of the design. A solution indicates they would be looking for contributions from local communities and developers. They have told the T that they are willing to take on some maintenance responsibilities when completed. He stated that as that information comes to the city he will apprise the City Council.

Councillor McGovern asked how much the city enforces the idling policy from its own fleet. He asked what is done to train and remind City staff of this policy. Mr. O’Riordan stated that all of the division heads remind staff in terms of safety and proper manners on the road in terms of parking, idling, etc. Councillor McGovern stated that it would be beneficial to look at increased enforcement of idling tour buses in Harvard Square. Councillor McGovern asked if there is any conversation about moving the city toward an electric fleet of cars. Mr. O’Riordan responded that they continue to work with all departments regarding the green fleet policy to the extent feasible. He stated that as more electric vehicles come on line and are reasonably priced they will move to do that but added that this will not happen with large maintenance vehicles. Lisa Peterson, Deputy City Manager, stated that the battery capacity in the winter is very poor in an electric vehicle. She stated that when you utilize the heat in an electric vehicle you cannot travel many miles. She stated that there is a need for more miles between battery charges. Susanne Rasmussen stated that they have been pursuing grant opportunities for charging stations. She stated that currently there are 18 charging stations in total and added that the next generation of charging stations will be much more effective. She stated that a challenge is that it is not easy to figure out how to contribute to creating charging stations. She stated that over FY16 there will be more of a strategy to gain fast-charging and broad distribution of charging facilities.

Councillor McGovern asked if there could be improvement in the notification or the signage that “No Left Turn” is allowed at the intersection of Prospect Street and Massachusetts Avenue. Councillor McGovern also asked if there will be a report forthcoming regarding the Amsterdam Conference that was attended by City staff. Mr. Barr responded that there will be a report forthcoming. Ms. Farooq stated that there are pros and cons to the Dutch model and it is very positive in terms of the bike infrastructure but added that there are important national policy trends and behavioral trends. She added that pedestrians suffered in the attempt to create great bike infrastructure.

Councillor McGovern then turned to the conversation about the high traffic volume in the City. Mr. Barr stated that the city is seeing a lot of traffic from other communities that is traveling through Cambridge. He stated that the City is doing everything it can to encourage a more sustainable transportation system. He stated that it is a regional issue but added that compared to 5 years ago, there was a dip in certain locations in traffic. He stated that the overall trend is downward.

Vice Mayor Benzan thanked the City staff for its presentation. He stated that there was discussion about Complete Streets model not being ideal for the City of Cambridge. He asked what model would be the most beneficial for the Cambridge. Ms. Rasmussen stated that the hierarchy in Holland are major roads, not a street that is comparable to a Cambridge Street. They do use the Complete Streets approach. Mr. Barr stated that there is no right answer for every situation. He stated that if community outreach is done the hope is that the result will be the best possible. Vice Mayor Benzan stated that part of the problem is the lack of parking garages for cars and finding parking is difficult. He asked about bike facilities and parking garages in the future. Ms. Farooq stated that in some ways we are in the “awkward stage” when

starting to think about parking for bikes as well as cars. She stated that Cambridge has produced a pedestrian-safety environment. She stated that when they visited the business district in Amsterdam, they do not want parking back because they are getting greater clientele from bikers and walkers. Mr. Barr stated that the parking supply that is provided supports all the needs. Finding the balance is a struggle. He stated that it is important to think creatively when thinking about the street right-of-way.

Vice Mayor Benzan then moved the conversation to Central Square. Ms. Watkins stated that they are in the process of putting together a bid package for Pearl Street. She stated that as part of last year's participatory budget process there was a public toilet funded for Central Square. She stated that the City will work with the community to find a suitable location for the toilet. Vice Mayor Benzan asked what can be seen in the neighborhood that will help encourage people to use their bikes. Ms. Watkins stated that there will be an extensive community process with brainstorming of best ways to gain participation from the community.

Responding to a question asked by Vice Mayor Benzan regarding what type of contribution is being looked at for the Green Line extension, Mr. Rossi stated that this is an ongoing conversation and a very long process.

Councillor Mazen stated that he is pleased with the update. He stated that he would like to see a group/lobbying effort. He stated that lobbying on Capitol Hill or Beacon Hill would be beneficial. He stated that there needs to be engineering problem solving. He stated that for those in the City administration he would like to see more discussion on the engineering process precepts. He stated that lobbying, process and engineering conversation are the low hanging fruit. Mr. Rossi responded that the administration would be willing to work with a group who makes recommendations in that regard. He stated that the City could put together a letter and ask other communities if they are interested. He stated that if Cambridge has set policies issues that they want forwarded it could be done. Councillor Mazen stated that it seems that there is a conversation to be had and there is expertise in transit and there is an imminent disconnect between decision makers and expertise outside of that group. Mr. Rossi stated that he feels the situation will get worse before it gets better.

Councillor Mazen stated that he thinks the Complete Streets attitude does treat fairly all modes of transportation. He stated that one of the things that can be done is a gradual approach to parking.

Councillor Simmons stated that when thinking of through traffic movement, we must think about schools and the drop-off and pick-up of children. She stated that if we are going to continue work in The Port, the Fletcher-Maynard traffic is backed up because there is no place to park when dropping off students. She stated that traffic is backed up down the street. Mr. Rossi stated that a safer plan was made at the Putnam School and noted that they are doing the same at the King Open. He stated that it is much easier when working on new schools. He stated that unfortunately there are not a lot of alternatives when dealing with the Cambridgeport School on Elm Street or the Fletcher-Maynard Academy.

Councillor Simmons stated that there is designated parking for Mopeds and motorcycles in downtown Boston. She asked if there is a reason that Cambridge does not have such parking. Mr. Barr responded that he is not aware if the City of Cambridge has ever looked at this issue in detail. He stated that although mopeds and motorcycles seem good environmentally, they are nasty devices in terms of emissions. Councillor Simmons added that these designated parking spaces may aid in line of sight issues. Councillor Simmons stated that she would like to see Central Square as a priority area.

Mayor Maher stated that we cannot shy away from the fact that we have a strange relationship with the State. He stated that many of the large traffic issues are state related. He stated that as a community we need to figure out how to have conversations that will help move the conversation forward. He stated that he is perplexed as to how the State was so off in terms of the budget for this project. He stated that it seems to him that the taxpayers should be raising a raucous over the issue. He stated that when looking at crossing along Fresh Pond Parkway, they have put up guardrails in some areas but these crossings need to be made safer. He stated that we cannot shy away from the situation with the Alewife traffic. He stated that we are facing the wrath of people yet it is a State issue. He stated that what is going on in Inman Square is complete and utter chaos. He stated that some of it is an enforcement issue but it is amazing that there are not more issues in that square. He stated that the tour busses in Harvard Square are an issue. He stated that the redesign seems to be working a little better. He stated that there are constant violators at the intersection of Elliot and Mt. Auburn Street. He stated that at 5:00 PM in the evening traffic is worse in other communities than it is in Cambridge. He stated that he was hopeful at the beginning of the new administration at the State House but that one year in it is important to keep the pressure on to ensure that Cambridge is being heard. He stated that it is a shame with what is happening with the Green Line.

Mayor Maher thanked all for their attendance.

ADJOURNMENT

On motion of Councillor McGovern the meeting adjourned at 8:03 p.m.

A TRUE COPY:

ATTEST:-

Donna P. Lopez, City Clerk

A list of documents and other exhibits used at the meeting:

PowerPoint Presentation entitled Transportation Roundtable